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AUTHOR Callou, Dinah
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the details of existential sentences constructed with the Portuguese verbs "ter" and "haver" in the interpersonal form. The uses of these verbs are discussed and analyzed in detail. The history and evolution of linguistic changes in Brazilian Portuguese are discussed in an attempt to detect historical social and cultural factors responsible for the variation in existential sentences. (Contains 15 references.) (KFT)

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Ter/haver-existential clauses in Brazilian Portuguese: variation ad change[1]

Dinah Callou (UFRJ/CNPq-Brazil)

1. Introduction

Generally, the label "existential sentence" denotes the *there is/are* constructions and its equivalents in other languages. In this paper, I shall reserve the *term* ***existential sentences*** to designate sentences constructed with the verbs *ter* e *haver* in the impersonal form, as in example (1):

(1) *Há Tem muitas razões para agir assim* ("There are many reasons to act like this")

There is a certain amount of cross-linguistic variation as regards the verb appearing in central existential constructions. Many languages, like English, use the copula *be* (*there is/are*); some, like French (*il y a*) -- and contemporary Brazilian Portuguese (*tem*) -- as well, use *have*. Quirk *et alii* (1972), in *A grammar of contemporary English*, discuss a less common type of existential constructions in English in which an extra participant is introduced as theme: the subject of the verb *have*. In their own words "This refers to a person, thing, etc., indirectly involved in the existential proposition" (p.961), as in "*The porter had a taxi ready*".

Apart from languages that always use introductory adverbs in existential clauses, such as English (***there*** *to be*), French (*y avoir*), and Italian, in contemporary Brazilian Portuguese (example 5), the use of a deictic locative expression (examples 2, 3 and 4) is no longer obligatory. It should be observed that a prepositional phrase expressing "place" would be equivalent to a subject noun phrase in possessive constructions, as in (6) and (6').

(2) ... *que non* ***avia*** *y mouros nem judeus* ("that there were no moors or jews" - Cantigas de Santa Maria – 13th century)

[*there*]

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[1] This paper is based on the results of a wider research developed with Juanito Avelar during the past two years.

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(3) ... ***debaixo*** *do estrado* ***há*** *uma bateria elétrica* ("under the mattress frame there is an electric battery" -19th century)

[*below, under*]

(4) ... *aqui tem cinema,* ***tem*** *teatro* ("here there is a movie theater, there is a theater"- AC015/90 – 20th century)

[*here*]

(5) ... *acho que não* ***tem*** *solução* ("I think there is no solution" - AC002/90 – 20th century)

(6) ...*na minha casa* ***tinha*** *um jardim* ("in my house there was a garden")

(6') ...*minha casa* ***tinha*** *um jardim* ("my house had a garden")

For a long time, many authors have postulated the hypothesis that existential and locative sentences may be gathered together in a same group. Since Lyons (1979), it has been observed that, in almost all languages, possessive and existential clauses may be considered to be syntactically derived – synchronically as well as diachronically -- from locative constructions. Guéron, 1986 (*apud* Franchi *et alii*) justifies this position through the use of the same verb *avoir* both in existential and possessive sentences. The same is true for Brazilian Portuguese, in which the use of *ter* in a third-person singular form gives rise to an existential expression.

This derivational hypothesis is no longer accepted by many authors. Viotti (1999), based on Chomsky's minimalist program, presents a formal explanation to explain the syntax of existential clauses in Portuguese. Observing the history of the verb *ter* in Brazilian Portuguese, Viotti comes to the conclusion that all sentences with this verb -- regardless of the semantic domain -- presents the same syntactic origin. Franchi *et alii* (1998), based on the properties observed in the analysis of a *corpus* of spoken Brazilian Portuguese, say that "existential sentences fall into a class of constructions called impersonal constructions". Many linguists also refer to the fact that the noun phrase following the verb is usually indefinite – the so-called definiteness effect, pointed out by Milsark (1979).

In any case, our aim here is not to present arguments or take a position for either explanation of the phenomenon.

2.The problem and the data

The use of ***ter*** *(=to have)*/***haver*** *(=there to be)*-existential clauses represents one out of many linguistic changes that took place in Brazilian Portuguese beginning in the XIXth, and has been analyzed from different perspectives. Mattos e Silva (1997/1996/1989) presents a detailed description of use of these verbs in ancient Portuguese, but, in this paper we consider its use only in existential sentences, trying to detect the historical, social and structural factors that are responsible for its variation in contemporary Brazilian Portuguese. It has been assumed that certain syntactic, semantic and social factors influence variation between the two verbs. These are: verb tense and semantic nature of the internal argument, age group and gender, respectively.

The results are based on qualitative and quantitative sociolinguistic variation analyses in real time (short and long term) and in apparent time. The data are taken from written *corpora*, spanning the 13th to the 20th century, as well as from oral *corpora* consisting of informal interviews with University graduates (standard dialect) from Rio de Janeiro, stratified for age and gender. The spoken sample was collected in the 70's and in the 90's, for a panel and trend study.

Through-out the recorded history of Portuguese language, ***ter*** *(tenere)* and ***haver*** *(habere)* may be considered verbs of broad functionality. The multiple functions range from a main verb, indicating possession (7) and/or existence (8) to an auxiliary (9), indicating time, mood, and aspect and even to a 'light' or functional verb (10) that transfers predication to its object.

(7) *Ele* ***tem*** *muitos livros na mesa* ("*He has many books on the table*")

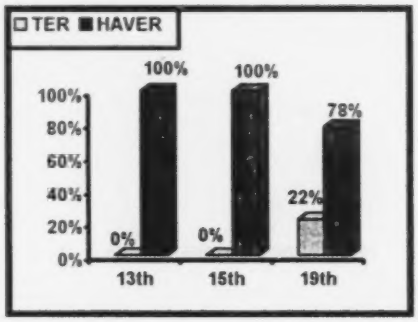
(8) ***Há/Tem*** muitos livros na mesa ("*There are many books on the table*")

(9) *Ele* ***tinha/havia comprado*** *muitos livros* ("*He had bought many books*")

(10) *Ele* ***tem tempo*** *para fazer o trabalho* ("*He has time to do the work*")

Given such a broadening of functions, *ter* eventually displaced *haver* in the semantic domain of possession. The overlapping of these verbs appears to be rooted in developments that took place much earlier in Latin. The intersection of meanings of ***habere***, prototypical possession (to *take possession, to maintain, to own)* and ***tenere***, secondary possession (*to hold[in hand]), to sustain, to possess, to obtain)* could explain the process.

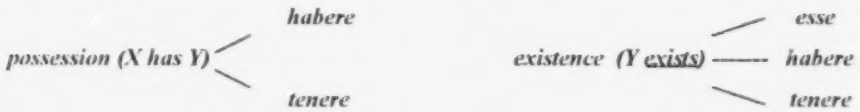
Beginning with the first documents, in Portuguese (Mattos e Silva, 1996), as well as in Spanish (Camarero, 1997 [apud Viotti]), there is a tendency to use ***ter*** as a verb of possession and by the middle of the 16th century *ter* displaced ***haver*** from this semantic domain. On the other hand, ***haver*** substitutes ***ser*** *(= to be)* as the central existential verb and the frequency of use of ***ter*** in existential clauses increases gradually over time (Figure 1). This substitution may also be traced back to the middle of the 16th



century, the same period in which ***haver*** no longer indicates possession, except in specific contexts.

Figure 1 – The alternation of use of ter/haver-existential clauses in the history of Portuguese language

The distribution of the three verbs, ***ter*** *(to have)*, ***haver*** *(there to be) and* ***ser*** *(to be)* in the nuclear domains of possession and existence may be represented by the following schemas:



Callou & Avelar (1999) show that, in the last century, the frequency of use of *ter* (22%) instead of *haver* (78%) was still low, although Júlio Ribeiro (1914), in his grammar, had observed that "*the substitution of* ***haver*** *by* ***ter*** *was increasing in Brazil, even in standard dialect*".

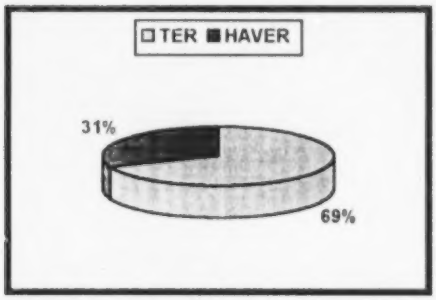


Figure 2 – Existential constructions with *ter* and *haver* in spoken language, taking into account the distribution in both samples

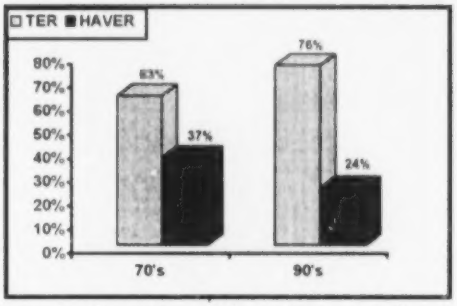


Figure 3 - Frequency of the verbs in each decade

Nowadays, the use of existential sentences with the ver ***ter*** is predominant in Brazilian Portuguese, in opposition to ***haver***, as we can see in Figure 2.

If we take into consideration the two decades, the results suggest that there is a change in progress (Figure 3).

2. Conditioning factors: statistical results

For the spoken language (1528 tokens), both in the 70's and in the 90's, the VARBRUL program shows that the most significant structural and social factors are: verb tense, semantic nature of the internal argument, age group – by decade -- and gender.

For *tense*, *ter-existential* sentences usually appears in the present tense and *haver* in the past (perfect and imperfect). Table 1 exhibits this opposition and the increase in use of *ter* in the 90's (with different speakers) when the verb is in the perfect tense.

TENSE	70's	90's
Present	340/486 70% / .60	350/397 88% / .60
Perfect	5/48 10% / .09	15/43 35% / .38
Imperfect	159/250 64% / .44	137/ 205 69% / .45

Table 1 – Percentage and Relative Weight of the use of *ter*

The numbers suggest that *haver*, in spoken language, has become a typical verb of narratives, a discourse modality that favors the use of the past tense.

For the semantic nature of the internal argument, the following factors were postulated: animate (11 and 12), inanimate – concrete -- (13 and 14), abstract (17 and 18), space – public place, district, region -- (15 and 16), and event (19 and 20).

(11) ***há*** *mulheres que se comportam...* (70-233)
"There are women that behave themselves"

(12) *aqui no Leblon* ***tem*** *o padre ...* (90-347)
"Here, in Leblon, there is the priest"

(13) ***havia*** *muita banana...* (70-141)
"There was much (lots of) banana"

(14) ***tinha*** *biscoitos na C'olombo...* (90-002)
"There were biscuits (cookies) in Columbo"

(15) ***havia*** *alguns cinemas na cidade ...* (70-259)
"There were some movie theaters downtown"

(16) ***tem*** *bairros sensacionais fora de Salvador ...* (70-255)
"There are sensational neighborhoods outside of Salvador"

(17) *não* ***havia*** *uma censura tão grande, não* ***havia*** *exagero...* (70-259)
"There wasn't so much censorship, there was no exaggeration"

(18) *não* ***tem*** *mais o charme que tinha...* (70-255)
"It's old charm doesn't exist anymore.

(19) *foi uma fase que* ***houve*** *concursos públicos ...* (70-164)
"It was a phase in which there were public competitions"

(20) *quando eu fiz quinze anos,* ***teve*** *uma festa maravilhosa...* (90-002)
"When I was fifteen years old, there was a wonderful party"

Generally, when the internal argument is an "event", the verbs *ter* and *haver* are not really "existential" and could not be properly replaced by "exist". The verb has rather the meaning of "*occur*", "*happen*" or "*take place*", as in examples (21) to (23). In contemporary spoken Brazilian Portuguese, *haver* has a factual sense. In any case, the frequency of use of ter-existential sentences is higher from one decade to the other for all uses.

(21) *um dia* ***houve*** *uma enxurrada* (70-273)
"one day a heavy rain occurred"

(22) *quando* ***há*** *uma seca muito violenta* (70-247)

"when a violent draught occurs"

(23) *toda vez que* ***há uma festa*** (70-247)
"each time a party occurs"

As we can see (Figure 4), the use of haver is almost exclusively restricted to [+abstract] and [+event] arguments.

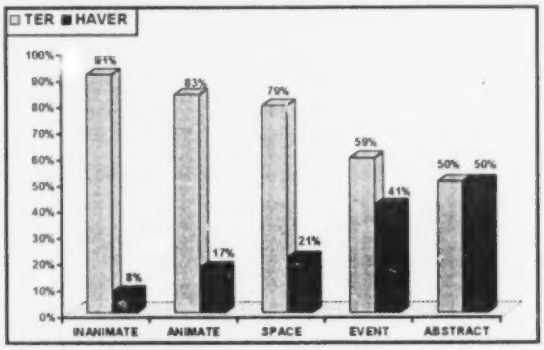


Figure 4 – Frequency of ter as regarding the semantic type of the argument

The great majority of cases that favor the use of *haver* refers to prototypical cases of the so-called "*light*" verbs, the object of which is not definite nor referential, as in examples 24, 25, 26 and 27.

(24) *não* ***há vantagem*** ... 90-164 ("there is no advantage")

(25) *não* ***há tempo*** ... 90-164 ("there is no time"

(26) ***há possibilidade*** .. 70-114 ("there is [a] possibility")

(27) *não* ***havia jeito*** ... 70-088 ("there was no way")

The patterns of distribution by age group are similar, but, in the 90's, there is a well marked opposition between younger speakers and middle-aged and older speakers: a curve of change in progress in the direction of elimination of *haver-existential* (Figure 5). Our hypothesis is that in school the use of *ter* may no longer be stigmatized, even in written language.

When we are dealing with the same speakers, in the two decades, the results run parallel to the projections of Labov's age-grading model, but at a higher level (8 % to 18 %). Thus, the majority of the community continues to advance in the use of *ter-existential* (Figure 6).

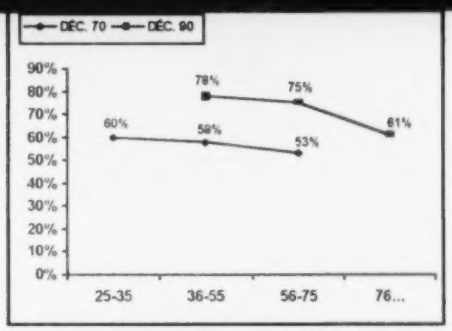


Figure 5 – Distribution of *ter* by age in the 70's and in the 90's (different speakers)

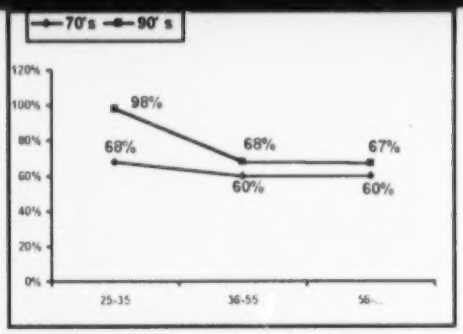


Figure 6 – Distribution of *ter* by age age group in the 70's and in the 90's (the same speakers)

Gender also has a significant effect, mainly in the 70's (Figure 7). It seems that women were in the lead of the process, insofar as younger women present higher frequency in the 70's (80% -female versus 46% - male), the use of *ter* being almost categorical (98%), in the 90's, in both male and female speech.

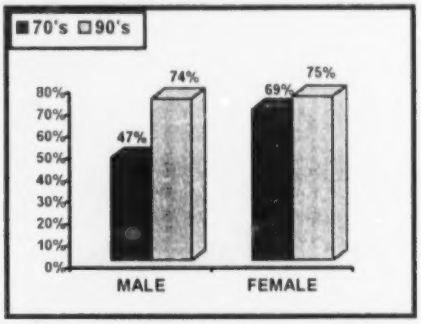


Figure 7 – The use of *ter*-existential in and female speech in both decades

3. Perspectives and conclusions

The next step in our research is to analyze more deeply the possibility of the presence of a pronominal subject, generally *você* or *a gente* , in *ter-existential* clauses, as seen in examples (28) and (29).

(28) *em Kioto, que era a antiga capital do Japão,* ***você tem*** *esses templos lado a lado com ... (90-012)*

"In Kyoto, which was the ancient capital of Japan, *you have* these temples, side by side with"...

(29) ***a gente tem*** *uma aglomeração de pessoas aqui na Tijuca* (90-002)

"*we / people] have* a crowd here at Tijuca

This use is increasing in the 90's (Figure 8) and it has been explained within the general tendency towards the loss of the principle "avoid pronoun" (Duarte, 1995) in Brazilian Portuguese.

The preceding sections have also shown the following:

a) there is a real-time change taking place (*haver-existential* → *ter-existential*) and age-grading seems to be involved in the process;

b) it is possible that the substitution of *ser-existential* by *haver-existential* was already complete at the 16th century;

c) the use of *haver-existential* (78%) has prevailed till the 19th century;

d) younger speakers no longer have *haver-existential sentence* in speech.

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